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**THOMAS SWEATT PLEADS GUILTY TO 45 RESIDENTIAL ARSONS IN  
MARYLAND, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND VIRGINIA  
INCLUDING TWO HOMICIDES**

**GREENBELT**, Maryland - United States Attorneys for the District of Maryland Allen F. Loucks, for the District of Columbia Kenneth L. Wainstein, and for the Eastern District of Virginia Paul J. McNulty, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Special Agent-in-Charge Theresa R. Stoop announce that today Thomas Sweatt, age 50, of Washington, D.C., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge Deborah K. Chasanow to criminal informations which charge Sweatt with various counts alleging possession of destructive devices; destruction of buildings by fire resulting in personal injury; possession of destructive devices in furtherance of a crime of violence; and in the criminal information originally filed in the District of Columbia, first degree premeditated murder (felony murder) and second degree murder. The criminal informations filed in the United States District Courts for the District of Columbia and the Eastern District of Virginia have been transferred to the District of Maryland.

Pursuant to the defendant's guilty plea to two counts of possession of destructive devices in furtherance of a crime of violence, the Defendant faces a mandatory life sentence at his sentencing before Judge Chasanow on September 12, 2005 at 9:30 a.m.

According to the agreed statement of facts presented to the court, beginning in February 2003 and continuing through December of 2004, Sweatt deliberately set a series of fires in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia, understanding that his actions would result in damage and injury to persons and property. The Defendant set 45 residential fires using incendiary devices, the components of which were a one-gallon, plastic jug; a plastic bag; and a cloth material used as a wick. Gasoline was utilized as an accelerant in the devices. In addition to the residential fires, Sweatt also set 4 fires to vehicles parked at a parking lot located at 8<sup>th</sup> and I Streets, S.E., Washington, D.C., in February and March of 2003.

Investigators from the Serial Arson Task Force were able to identify Sweatt as the perpetrator of the arsons by, among other things, matching DNA samples recovered at various fire scenes. Upon his arrest on April 27, 2005, Sweatt admitted in a videotaped confession to Task Force Agents that he picked his targets at random, that he typically placed the device near a door because it was more likely to burn at that location and that he was, at times, aware that persons were in the homes at which he set these devices on fire.

### **Description of Selected Fires in the District of Columbia**

On February 5, 2002, the District of Columbia Fire Department was called to 1210 Montello Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. for the report of a fire. A subsequent cause and origin investigation revealed that the fire was intentionally set (incendiary) by pouring an accelerant. It was further determined that the smoke from the fire seeped through the walls to the adjoining house where 89-year-old Annie Brown resided. Ms. Brown suffered from smoke inhalation and was taken to the hospital where she died on February 14, 2002. An autopsy revealed that the cause of death was smoke inhalation and the manner of death was a homicide.

A search of the Defendant's residence on April 27, 2005 revealed a newspaper clipping about this fire.

On June 5, 2003, the District of Columbia Fire Department was called to 2800 Evarts Street, N.E, Washington, D.C. for the report of a fire. Once there, they found the house totally engulfed in flames. Two occupants had escaped the house by jumping from a second-story window to safety. Firefighters rescued 86-year-old Lou Edna Jones from her second-floor bedroom where she had been trapped. She was taken to Washington Hospital Center where she was pronounced dead. An autopsy revealed that the cause of death was smoke inhalation and the manner of death was a homicide. A subsequent cause and origin investigation revealed that the fire was intentionally set (incendiary) by utilizing a suspected destructive device containing an ignitable liquid. The device was placed on the outside near the front door. The fire penetrated the interior first floor and made its way up the stairwell to the second floor. On April 27, 2005, Sweatt admitted starting the fire at Evarts Street that led to the death of Lou Edna Jones. Sweatt stated that he picked the house at random. He stated that he sat on the porch for about fifteen minutes getting his nerve up and thinking about what he was going to do. As he sat there, he admired Ms. Jones's porch, which had been recently renovated.

As part of the plea agreement, Sweatt has admitted setting each of these fatal fires and has pleaded guilty to charges of murder.

### **Description of Selected Maryland Fires**

On Saturday, February 14, 2004, at 4:53 a.m., the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services Department responded to 7700 Blair Road, Silver Spring, Maryland for the report of a fire. A subsequent cause and origin investigation revealed that the fire was intentionally set

(incendiary) utilizing a suspected destructive device containing an ignitable liquid. The device was placed and ignited between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors of the building's only stairwell. The apartment building is a walk-up, garden style apartment. The primary cause and origin investigator's report stated that as the destructive device activated, the burning ignitable liquid flowed across the landing, and down the steps toward the first floor landing. The fire grew up and out, consuming all available combustible materials. The fire burned very intensely, producing high heat and large volumes of smoke and gaseous products of combustion. The fire produced conditions which were untenable, and prevented the occupants of the structure from exiting the structure as the fire was in the only exit stairwell. Occupants were forced to jump from second and third story windows, resulting in injuries to some of the occupants. Recovered from the scene was fabric from a pair of pants. Human DNA was isolated from samples recovered from the pant leg and was identified as that of Sweatt.

On Friday, April 16, 2004, at 3:29 a.m., members of the Prince George's County, Maryland Fire Department responded to 2401 Rosecroft Village Circle East, Oxon Hill, Maryland for the report of a fire. A subsequent cause and origin investigation revealed that the fire was intentionally set (incendiary) on the exterior of the occupied residence. The residents of the structure (including a mother, young child and grandmother) were asleep at the time of the fire. Forensic examination of paper recovered from the scene revealed that it was a Jackson Hewitt Tax Service advertisement on the rear of a cash register receipt. The advertisement was prepared for the Giant Food Store #156, located at 1414 8<sup>th</sup> Street N.W., Washington, D.C. Additional investigation revealed that the Defendant made a purchase on Thursday April 15, 2004 at approximately 1:44 a.m. In addition, on April 27, 2005, the Defendant admitted that

he set this fire.

During Sweatt's confession to Task Force Agents, he acknowledged setting these fires and his guilty plea included accepting responsibility for these fires which caused personal injury to several victims.

### **Description of Selected Virginia Fires**

On November 16, 2003, the Alexandria Fire Department responded to a fire at 4410 Braddock Road in Alexandria, Virginia which is a cottage for the Lynn House, a nursing care facility operated by the Church of Christian Science. The Lynn House leases rooms to nurses who are working in the area longer than three months. A destructive device like the one previously used by Sweatt to set fires was recovered from that location. After his arrest, the defendant confessed to having set the fire.

On December 5, 2004, the Arlington County, Virginia Fire Department responded to 301 N. Bryan Street, Arlington, Virginia for the report of a fire. A subsequent cause and origin determination revealed that the fire was intentionally set (incendiary) on the rear/side porch of a single family residence. Among the evidence recovered was one pair of United States Marine Corps dress blue trousers and a United States Marine Corps dress white hat. Human DNA was isolated from samples recovered from the waistband area of the pants and Sweatt was identified as a contributor of those DNA samples.

United States Attorney Allen F. Loucks stated that "Today's admission of guilt to setting 45 residential fires, for which he faces a life sentence, is a milestone in this two year long investigation. I hope today marks another step in the healing process for the victims and their families, and that the citizens of our communities feel a sense of relief that the serial arsonist has

been found, convicted and will spend the rest of his life behind bars.”

"For more than two years, this defendant terrorized our community by setting fires which destroyed many homes and took the lives of two elderly women in the District of Columbia. Today's conviction is a tribute to our law enforcement partners on the Serial Arson Task Force whose devoted efforts led to the defendant's apprehension. We trust that this prosecution will provide some measure of comfort to the many victims who suffered at the hands of this defendant," stated U.S. Attorney Wainstein.

ATF-Special Agent-in-Charge Theresa Stoop stated that "I want to thank everyone for their continued support in this investigation. It has been a long two years and now the public has heard from Thomas Sweatt. Admitting to setting the fires should allow all of us to sleep soundly. It is my hope that today's guilty plea allows the victims a chance to move forward and to heal. To the families of Lou Edna Jones and Annie Brown, I offer my deepest condolences."

The case is a result of a two year investigation by the Serial Arson Task Force which includes Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; District of Columbia Fire/EMS; Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department; Metro Police Department; Prince George's County Police; Maryland State Fire Marshal; Montgomery County Department of Fire and Rescue Services; Fairfax County Fire and Rescue; Maryland State Police; Anne Arundel County Fire; Alexandria Fire Department; Howard County Police Department; and Baltimore City Fire Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mythili Raman and James M. Trusty from the District of Maryland, Jennifer Anderson from the District of Columbia and Morris Parker from the Eastern District of Virginia..

